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Human Rights Situation in Argentina

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The human rights situation in Argentina is still disheartening, although there are a few hopeful developments. On June 15 it was reported that 342 prisoners would be released from executive custody. The Embassy believes that most of these prisoners were in fact either freed or charged formally. It seems likely that the Argentine government will restore a limited form of "right of option," whereby state of siege prisoners may seek voluntary exile. There are also signs that Argentine President Videla may be gaining support from other generals for a greater ventilation of political ideas with civilian leaders.

Despite these positive developments, there are numerous cases where human rights are still being violated. The human rights situation remains the principal obstacle to closer relations between our two countries. The Argentine government continues to refuse to acknowledge the names of thousands of political prisoners under detention; disappearances, summary executions, torture and prolonged periods of incommunication are undeniable. Government officials claim that the terrorists pose a grave threat to Argentine society, and that counterterrorist violations of human rights are therefore justified on the grounds of security considerations. The terrorist threat to Argentine security, however, has been greatly diminished by the government's harsh methods.

Many Argentines fear that official repression is spreading to include any outspoken member of society. It appears that civilians are often used as pawns in the intra-military struggle between moderates and hardliners. Argentina's Ambassador to Venezuela was kidnapped in Buenos Aires. He still has not been found. At least five labor leaders have recently been warned to leave Argentina, and a prominent Jewish leader has already fled the country after being threatened. The current power struggle is responsible in part for some of the recent excesses. Despite some positive developments, the human rights situation is still very uncertain.

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPs

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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